MUNSEY

AUG 17 1922

A NEW SERIAL
BY CHAS. NEVILLE BUCK

A NOVELETTE
BY ELEANOR GATES &
FREDERICK F. MOORE

SHORT STORIES
BY

JOHN D. SWAIN : : :
ELISABETH S. HOLDING
ELLIS PARKER BUTLER
JAMES W. EGAN : : :
MYRON BRINIG : : : :
MARIAN GRAHAM : :
HOWARD ERICKSON :
KENNETH HOWELL : :

UNIV. OF MICH. AUG 17 1922

SEPTEMBER

PRICE 25 CENTS

The Girl from Hollywood

A MODERN DRAMA OF CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "A Princess of Mars," etc.

XX

THE pock-marked Mexican stepped close to Shannon and took hold of her bridle reins.

"You think," he said in broken English, "we are damn fool? If you do not come from Allen, you come for no good to us. You tell us the truth, damn quick, or you never go back to tell where you find us and bring policemen here!"

His tone was ugly and his manner threatening.

There was no harm in telling these men the truth, though it was doubtful whether they would believe her. She realized that she was in a predicament from which it might not be easy to extricate herself. She had told them that she was alone, and if they suspected her motives they might easily do away with her. She knew how lightly the criminal Mexican esteems life—especially the life of the hated gringo.

"I have come to warn you because a friend of mine is going to watch for you next Friday night. He does not know who you are, or what you bring out of the hills. I do, and so I know that rather than be caught you might kill him, and I do not want him killed. That is all."

"How do you know what we bring out of the hills?'

"Allen told me."

"Allen told you? I do not believe you. Do you know where Allen is?"

"He is in jail in Los Angeles. I heard him telling a man in Los Angeles last July."

"Who is the friend of yours that is going to watch for us?"

"Mr. Pennington."

"You have told him about us?"

"I have told you that he knows nothing about you. All he knows is that some one comes down with burros from the hills, and that they cut his fence last Friday night. He wants to catch you and find out what you are doing."

"Why have you not told him?"

She hesitated.

"That can make no difference," she said presently.

"It makes a difference to us. I told you to tell the truth, or—"

The Mexican raised his rifle that she might guess the rest.

"I did not want to have to explain how I knew about you. I did not want Mr. Pennington to know that I knew such men as Allen."

"How did you know Allen?"

"That has nothing to do with it at all. I have warned you so that you can take steps to avoid discovery and capture. I shall tell no one else about you. Now let me go."

She gathered Baldy and tried to rein him about, but the man clung to her bridle.

"Not so much of a hurry, *señorita!* Unless I know how Allen told you so much, I cannot believe that he told you anything. The police have many ways of learning things—sometimes they use women. If you are a friend to Allen, all right. If you are not, you know too damn much for to be very good for your health. You had better tell me all the truth, or you shall not ride away from here—ever!"

"Very well," she said. "I met Allen in a house in Hollywood where he sold his 'snow,' and I heard him telling the man there how you disposed of the whisky that was stolen in New York, brought here to

Copyright, 1922, by Edgar Rice Burroughs—This story began in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

the coast in a ship, and hidden in the mountains."

"What is the name of the man in whose house you met Allen?"

"Crumb."

The man raised his heavy brows.

"How long since you been there—in that house in Hollywood?"

"Not since the last of July. I left the house the same time Allen did."

"You know how Allen he get in jail?"

The girl saw that a new suspicion had been aroused in the man, and she judged that the safer plan was to be perfectly frank.

"I do not know, for I have seen neither Crumb nor Allen since; but when I read in the paper that he had been arrested that night, I guessed that Crumb had done it. I heard Crumb ask him to deliver some snow to a man in Hollywood. I know that Crumb is a bad man, and that he was trying to steal your share of the money from Allen."

The man thought in silence for several minutes, the lines of his heavy face evidencing the travail with which some new idea was being born. Presently he looked up, the light of cunning gleaming in his evil eyes.

"You go now," he said. "I know you! Allen tell me about you a long time ago. You Crumb's woman, and your name is Gaza. You will not tell anything about us to your rich friends the Penningtons—you bet you won't!"

The Mexican laughed loudly, winking at his companions.

Shannon could feel the burning flush that suffused her face. She closed her eyes in what was almost physical pain, so terribly did the humiliation torture her pride, and then came the nausea of disgust. The man had dropped her reins, and she wheeled Baldy about.

"You will not come Friday night?" she asked, wishing some assurance that her sacrifice had not been entirely unavailing.

"Mr. Pennington will not find us Friday night, and so he will not be shot."

She rode away then; but there was a vague suspicion lurking in her mind that there had been a double meaning in the man's final words.

Custer Pennington, occupied in the office for a couple of hours after lunch, had just come from the house, and was standing on the brow of the hill looking out over the ranch toward the mountains. His gaze, wandering idly at first, was suddenly riveted upon a tiny speck moving downward from the mouth of a distant ravine—a moving speck which he recognized, even at that distance, to be a horseman, where no horseman should have been. For a moment he watched it, and then, returning to the house, he brought out a pair of binoculars.

Now the speck had disappeared; but he knew that it was down in the bottom of the basin, hidden by the ridge above Jackknife Cañon, and he waited for the time when it would reappear on the crest. For five, ten, fifteen minutes he watched the spot where the rider should come into view once more. Then he saw a movement in the brush and leveled his glasses upon the spot, following the half seen figure until it emerged into a space clear of chaparral. Now they were clearly revealed by the powerful lenses, the horse and its rider—Baldy and Shannon!

Pennington dropped the glasses at his side, a puzzled expression on his face, as he tried to find some explanation of the fact that the binoculars had revealed. From time to time he caught glimpses of her again as she rode down the cañon; but when, after a considerable time, she did not emerge upon the road leading to the house, he guessed that she had crossed over El Camino Corto. Why she should do this he could not even conjecture. It was entirely out of her way, and a hilly trail, while the other was a wagon road leading almost directly from Sycamore to her house.

Presently he walked around the house to the north side of the hill, where he had a view of the valley spreading to the east and the west and the north. Toward the west he could see the road that ran above the Evanses' house all the way to Horse Camp Cañon.

He did not know why he stood there watching for Shannon. It was none of his affair where she rode, or when. It seemed strange, though, that she should have ridden alone into the hills after having refused to ride with him. It surprised him, and troubled him, too, for it was the first suggestion that Shannon could commit even the most trivial act of underhandedness.

After a while he saw her emerge from Horse Camp Cañon and follow the road to her own place. Custer ran his fingers through his hair in perplexity. He was troubled not only because Shannon had ridden without him, after telling him that

she could not ride that afternoon, but also because of the direction in which she had ridden—the trail of which he had told her that he thought it led to the solution of the mystery of the nocturnal traffic. He had told her that he would not ride it before Saturday, for fear of arousing the suspicions of the men he wished to surprise in whatever activity they might be engaged upon; and within a few hours she had ridden deliberately up into the mountains on that very trail.

The more Custer considered the matter, the more perplexed he became. At last he gave it up in sheer disgust. Doubtless Shannon would tell him all about it when he called for her later in the afternoon. He tried to forget it; but the thing would not be forgotten.

Several times he realized, with surprise, that he was hurt because she had ridden without him. He tried to argue that he was not hurt, that it made no difference to him, that she had a perfect right to ride with or without him as she saw fit, and that he did not care a straw one way or the other.

No, it was not that that was troubling him—it was something else. He didn't know what it was, but a drink would straighten it out; so he took a drink. He realized that it was the first he had had in a week, and almost decided not to take it; but he changed his mind. After that he took several more without bothering his conscience to any appreciable extent. When his conscience showed signs of life, he reasoned it back to innocuous desuetude by that unanswerable argument:

"What's the use?"

By the time he left to call for Shannon he was miserably happy and happily miserable; yet he showed no outward sign that he had been drinking, unless it was that he swung the roadster around the curves of the driveway leading down the hill a bit more rapidly than usual.

Shannon was ready and waiting for him. She came out to the car with a smile—a smile that hid a sad and frightened heart; and he greeted her with another that equally belied his inward feelings. As they rode up to the castle on the hill, he gave her every opportunity to mention and explain her ride, principally by long silences, though never by any outward indication that he thought she had aught to explain. If she did not care to have him know about it, she should never know from him that he already knew; but the canker of suspicion was already gnawing at his heart, and he was realizing, perhaps for the first time, how very desirable this new friendship had grown to be.

Again and again he insisted to himself that what she had done made no difference—that she must have had some excellent reason. Perhaps she had just wanted to be alone. He often had experienced a similar longing. Even when Grace had been there, he had occasionally wanted to ride off into the hills with nothing but his own thoughts for company.

Yet, argue as he would, the fact remained that it had made a difference, and that he was considering Shannon now in a new light. Just what the change meant he probably could not have satisfactorily explained, had he tried; but he did not try. He knew that there was a difference, and that his heart ached when it should not ache. It made him angry with himself, with the result that he went to his room and had another drink.

Shannon, too, felt the difference. She thought that it was her own guilty conscience, though why she should feel guilt for having risked so much for his sake she did not know. Instinctively she was honest, and so to deceive one whom she loved, even for a good purpose, troubled her.

Something else troubled her, too. She knew that Custer had been drinking again, and she recalled what he had said to her, that morning, of the help she had been to him in getting away from his habit. She knew too well herself what it meant to fight for freedom from a settled vice, and she had been glad to have been instrumental in aiding him. She had had to fight her own battle alone; she did not want him to face a similar ordeal.

She wondered why he had been drinking that afternoon. Could it have been because she had not been able to ride with him, and thus left alone he had reverted to the old habit? The girl reproached herself, even though she felt, after her interview with the Mexicans, that she had undoubtedly saved Custer's life.

The Evanses, mother and son, were also at the Penningtons' for dinner that night. Shannon had noticed that it was with decreasing frequency that Grace's name was mentioned of late. She knew the reason. Letters had become fewer and fewer from

the absent girl. She had practically ceased writing to Custer. Her letters to Mrs. Evans were no longer read to the Penningtons, for there had crept into them a new and unpleasant note that was as foreign as possible to the girl who had gone away months before. They showed a certain carelessness and lack of consideration that had pained them all.

They always asked after the absent girl, but her present life and her career were no longer discussed, since the subject brought nothing but sorrow to them all. That she had been disappointed and disillusioned seemed probable, since she had obtained only a few minor parts in mediocre pictures; and now she no longer mentioned her ambition, and scarcely ever wrote of her work.

At dinner that night Eva was unusually quiet until the colonel, noticing it, asked if she was ill.

"There!" she cried. "You all make life miserable for me because I talk too much, and then, when I give you a rest, you ask if I am ill. What shall I do? If I talk, I pain you. If I fail to talk, I pain you; but if you must know, I am too thrilled to talk just now—I am going to be married!"

"All alone?" inquired Custer.

A sickly purplish hue, threatening crimson complications, crept from beneath Guy's collar and enveloped his entire head. He reached for his water goblet and ran the handle of his fork up his sleeve. The ensuing disentanglement added nothing to his equanimity, though it all but overturned the goblet. Custer was eying him with a seraphic expression that boded ill.

"What's the matter, Guy—measles?" he asked with a beatific smile.

Guy grinned sheepishly, and was about to venture an explanation when Eva interrupted him. The others at the table were watching the two with amused smiles.

"You see, momsy," said Eva, addressing her mother, "Guy has sold a story. He got a thousand dollars for it."

"Oh, not a thousand!" expostulated Guy.

"Well, it was nearly a thousand—if it had been three hundred dollars more it would have been—and so now that our future is assured we are going to be married. I hadn't intended to mention it until Guy had talked with popsy, but this will be very much nicer, and easier for Guy."

Guy looked up appealingly at the colonel.

"You see, sir, I was summing to key you—I mean I was—"

"You see what it is going to mean to have an author in the family," said Custer. "He's going to talk away above our heads. We won't know what he's talking about half the time. I don't now. Do you, Guy?"

"For pity's sake, Custer, leave the boy alone!" laughed Mrs. Pennington. "You're enough to rattle a stone image. And now, Guy, you know you don't have to feel embarrassed. We have all grown accustomed to the idea that you and Eva would marry, so it is no surprise. It makes us very happy."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pennington," said the boy. "It wasn't that it was hard to tell you. It was the way Eva wanted me to do it—like a book. I was supposed to come and ask the colonel for her hand in a very formal manner, and it made me feel foolish, the more I thought of it—and I have been thinking about it all day. So, you see, when Eva blurted it out, I thought of my silly speech."

"It wasn't a silly speech," interrupted Eva. "It was simplimetic gorgeristic. You thought so yourself when you made *Bruce Bellinghame* ask *Hortense's* father for her. '*Mr. Le Claire,*' he said, squaring his manly shoulders, 'it is with emotions of deepest solemnity and a full realization of my unworthiness that I approach you upon this beautiful day in May—'"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Eva, *please!*" begged Guy.

They were all laughing now, including Eva and Guy. The tears were rolling down Custer's cheeks.

"That editor was guilty of grand larceny when he offered you seven hundred berries for the story. Why, the gem alone is easily worth a thousand. Adieu, Mark Twain! Farewell, Bill Nye! You've got 'em all nailed to the post, Guy Thackeray!"

The colonel wiped his eyes.

"I gather," he said, "that you two children wish to get married. Do I surmise correctly?"

"Oh, popsy, you're just wonderful!" exclaimed Eva.

"Yes, how did you guess it, father?" asked Custer. "Marvelous deductive faculties for an old gentleman, I'll say!"

"That will be about all from you, Custer," admonished the colonel.

"Any time that I let a chance like this slip!" returned young Pennington. "Do you think I have forgotten how those two imps pestered the life out of Grace and me a few short years ago? Nay, nay!"

"I don't blame Custer a bit," said Mrs. Evans. "Guy and Eva certainly did make life miserable for him and Grace."

"That part of it is all right—it is Guy's affair and Eva's; but did you hear him refer to me as an old gentleman?"

They all laughed.

"But you *are* a gentleman," insisted Custer.

The colonel, his eyes twinkling, turned to Mrs. Evans.

"Times have changed, Mae, since we were children. Imagine speaking thus to our fathers!"

"I'm glad they have changed, Custer. It's terrible to see children afraid of their parents. It has driven so many of them away from home."

"No danger of that here," said the colonel.

"It is more likely to be the other way around," suggested Mrs. Pennington. "In the future we may hear of parents leaving home because of the exacting tyranny of their children."

"My children shall be brought up properly," announced Eva, "with proper respect for their elders."

"Guided by the shining example of their mother," said Custer.

"And their Uncle Cutie," she retorted.

"Come, now," interrupted the colonel, "let's hear something about your plans. When are you going to be married?"

"Yes," offered Custer. "Now that the seven hundred dollars has assured their future, there is no reason why they shouldn't be married at once and take a suite at the Ambassador. I understand they're as low as thirty-five hundred a month."

"Aw, I have more than the seven hundred," said Guy. "I've been saving up for a long time. We'll have plenty to start with."

Shannon noticed that he flushed just a little as he made the statement, and she alone knew why he flushed. It was too bad that Custer's little sister should start her married life on money of that sort!

Shannon felt that at heart Guy was a good boy—that he must have been led into this traffic originally without any adequate realization of its criminality. Her own misfortune had made her generously ready to seek excuses for wrong-doing in others; but she dreaded to think what it was going to mean to Eva and the other Penningtons if ever the truth became known. From her knowledge of the sort of men with whom Guy was involved, she was inclined to believe that the menace of exposure or blackmail would hang over him for many years, even if the former did not materialize in the near future; for she was confident that if his confederates were discovered by the authorities, they would immediately involve him, and would try to put the full burden of responsibility upon his shoulders.

"I don't want the financial end of matrimony to worry either of you," the colonel was saying. "Guy has chosen a profession in which it may require years of effort to produce substantial returns. All I shall ask of my daughter's husband is that he shall honestly apply himself to his work. If you do your best, Guy, you will succeed, and in the meantime I'll take care of the finances."

"But we don't want it that way," said Eva. "We don't want to live on charity."

"Do you think that what I give to my little girl would be given in a spirit of charity?" the colonel asked.

"Oh, popsy, I know you wouldn't feel that it was; but can't you see how Guy would feel? I want him to be independent. I'd rather get along with a little, and feel that he had earned it all."

"It may take a long time, Eva," said Custer; "and in the meantime the best part of your lives would be spent in worry and scrimping. I know how you feel; but there's a way around it that has the backing of established business methods. Let father finance Guy's writing ability, just as inventive genius is sometimes financed. When Guy succeeds, he can pay back with interest."

"What a dapper little thought!" exclaimed the girl. "That would fix everything, wouldn't it? You radiant man!"

XXI

On the following Monday a pock-marked Mexican appeared at the county jail in Los Angeles, during visitors' hours, and asked to be permitted to see Slick Allen. The two stood in a corner and conversed in whispers. Allen's face wore an ugly scowl when his visitor told him of young Pennington's interference with their plans.

"It's getting too hot for us around there," said Allen. "We got to move. How much junk you got left?"

"About sixty cases of booze. We got rid of nearly three hundred cases on the coast side, without sending 'em through Evans. There isn't much of the other junk left—a couple pounds altogether, at the outside."

"We got to lose the last of the booze," said Allen; "but we'll get our money's worth out of it. Now you listen, and listen careful, Bartolo."

He proceeded very carefully and explicitly to explain the details of a plan which brought a grin of sinister amusement to the face of the Mexican. It was not an entirely new plan, but rather an elaboration and improvement of one that Allen had conceived some time before in the event of a contingency similar to that which had now arisen.

"And what about the girl?" asked Bartolo. "She should pay well to keep the Penningtons from knowing."

"Leave her to me," replied Allen. "I shall not be in jail forever."

During the ensuing days of that late September week, when Shannon and Custer rode together, there was a certain constraint in their relations that was new and depressing. The girl was apprehensive of the outcome of his adventure on the rapidly approaching Friday, while he could not rid himself of the haunting memory of her solitary and clandestine ride over the mysterious trail that led into the mountains.

It troubled him that she should have kept the thing a secret, and it troubled him that he should care. What difference could it make to him where Shannon Burke rode? He asked himself that question a hundred times; but though he always answered that it could make no difference, he knew perfectly well that it *had* made a difference.

He often found himself studying her face, as if he would find there either an answer to his question, or a refutation of the suspicion of trickery and deceit which had arisen in his mind and would not down. What a beautiful face it was—not despite its irregular features, but because of them, and because of the character and individuality they imparted to her appearance. Custer could not look upon that face and doubt her.

Several times she caught him in the act of scrutinizing her thus, and she wondered at it, for in the past he had never appeared to be consciously studying her. She was aware, too, that he was troubled about something. She wished that she might ask him—that she might invite his confidence, for she knew the pain of unshared sorrows; but he gave her no opening. So they rode together, often in silence; and though their stirrups touched many a time, yet constantly they rode farther and farther apart, just because chance had brought Custer Pennington from the office that Saturday afternoon to look out over the southern hills at the moment when Shannon had ridden down the trail into the meadow above Jackknife Cañon.

At last Friday came. Neither had reverted, since the previous Saturday, to the subject that was uppermost in the mind of each; but now Shannon could not refrain from seeking once more to deter Custer from his project. She had not been able to forget the sinister smile of the Mexican, or to rid her mind of an intuitive conviction that the man's final statement had concealed a hidden threat.

They were parting at the fork of the road—she had hesitated until the last moment.

"You still intend to try to catch those men to-night?" she asked.

"Yes—why?"

"I had hoped you would give it up. I am afraid something may happen. I—oh, please don't go, Custer!" She wished that she might add: "For my sake."

He laughed shortly.

"I guess there won't be any trouble. If there is, I can take care of myself."

She saw that it was useless to insist further.

"Let me know if everything is all right," she asked. "Light the light in the big cupola on the house when you get back—I can see it from my bedroom window—and then I shall know that nothing has happened. I shall be watching for it."

"All right," Custer promised, and they parted.

He wondered why she should be so perturbed about his plans for the night. There was something peculiar about that—something that he couldn't understand or explain, except in accordance with a single hypothesis—a hypothesis which he scorned to consider, yet which rode his thoughts like a veritable *Little Old Man of the Sea*. Had he known the truth, it would all have

been quite understandable; but how was he to know that Shannon Burke loved him?

When he reached the house, the ranch bookkeeper came to tell him that the Los Angeles operator had been trying to get him all afternoon.

"Somebody in L. A. wants to talk to you on important business," said the bookkeeper. "You're to call back the minute you get here."

Five minutes later he had his connection. An unfamiliar voice asked if he were the younger Mr. Pennington.

"I am," he replied.

"Some one cut your fence last Friday. You like to know who he is?"

"What about it? Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. I was with them. They double-crossed me. You want to catch 'em?"

"I want to know who they are, and why they cut my fence, and what the devil they're up to back there in the hills."

"You listen to me. You *sabe* Jackknife Cañon?"

"Yes."

"To-night they bring down the load just before dark. They do that every Friday, and hide the burros until very late. Then they come down into the valley while every one is asleep. To-night they hide 'em in Jackknife. They tie 'em there an' go away. About ten o'clock they come back. You be there nine o'clock, and you catch 'em when they come back. *Sabe?*"

"How many of 'em are there?"

"Only two. You don't have to be afraid —they don't pack no guns. You take gun an' you catch 'em all alone."

"But how do I know that you're not stringing me?"

"You listen. They double-cross me. I get even. You no want to catch 'em, I no care—that's all. Good-by!"

Custer turned away from the phone, running his fingers through his hair in a characteristic gesture signifying perplexity. What should he do? The message sounded rather fishy, he thought; but it would do no harm to have a look into Jackknife Cañon around nine o'clock. If he was being tricked, the worst he could fear was that they had taken this method of luring him to Jackknife while they brought the loaded burros down from the hills by some other route. If they had done that, it was very clever of them; but he would not be fooled a second time.

Custer Pennington didn't care to be laughed at, and so, if he was going to be hoaxed that night, he had no intention of having a witness to his idiocy. For that reason he did not take Jake with him, but rode alone up Sycamore when all the inmates of the castle on the hill thought him in bed and asleep. It was a clear night. Objects were plainly discernible at short distances, and when he passed the horse pasture he saw the dim bulks of the brood mares a hundred yards away. A coyote voiced its uncanny cry from a near hill. An owl hooted dismally from a distance; but these sounds, rather than depressing him, had the opposite effect, for they were of the voices of the nights that he had known and loved since childhood.

When he turned into Jackknife, he reined the Apache in and sat for a moment listening. From farther up the cañon, out of sight, there came the shadow of a sound. That would be the tethered burros, he thought, if the whole thing was not a trick; but he was certain that he heard the sound of something moving there.

He rode on again, but he took the precaution of loosening his gun in its holster. There was, of course, the bare possibility of a sinister motive behind the message he had received. As he thought of it now, it occurred to him that his informant was perhaps a trifle too insistent in assuring him that it was safe to come up here alone. Well, the man had put it over cleverly, if that had been his intent.

Now Custer saw a dark mass beneath a sycamore. He rode directly toward it, and in another moment he saw that it represented half a dozen laden burros tethered to the tree. He moved the Apache close in to them. There was no sign of men about.

He examined the packs, leaning over and feeling one. What they contained he could not guess; but it was not firewood. They evidently consisted of six wooden boxes to each burro, three on a side.

He reined the Apache in behind the burros in the darkness of the tree's shade, and there he waited for the coming of the men. He did not like the look of things at all. What could those boxes contain? There was no legitimate traffic through or out of those hills that could explain the weekly trip of this little pack train; and if the men in charge of it were employed in any illegitimate traffic, they would not be surrendering to a lone man as meekly as his in-

formant had suggested. The days of smuggling through the hills from the ocean was over—or at least Custer had thought it was over; but this thing commenced to look like a recrudescence of the old-time commerce.

As he sat there waiting, he had ample time to think. He speculated upon the identity and purpose of the mysterious informant who had called him up from Los Angeles. He speculated again upon the contents of the packs. He recalled the whisky that Guy had sold him from time to time, and wondered if the packs might not contain liquor. He had gathered from Guy that his supply came from Los Angeles, and he had never given the matter a second thought; but now he recalled the fact, and concluded that if this was whisky, it was not from the same source as Guy's.

All the time he kept thinking of Shannon and her mysterious excursion into the hills. He recalled her anxiety to prevent him from coming up here to-night, and he tried to find reasonable explanations for it. Of course, it was the obvious explanation that did not occur to him; but several did occur that he tried to put from his mind.

Then from the mouth of Jackknife he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. The Apache pricked up his ears, and Custer leaned forward and laid a hand upon his nostrils.

"Quiet, boy!" he admonished, in a low whisper.

The sounds approached slowly, halting occasionally. Presently two horsemen rode directly past him on the far side of the cañon. They rode at a brisk trot. Apparently they did not see the pack train, or, if they saw it, they paid no attention to it. They disappeared in the darkness, and the sound of their horses' hoofs ceased. Pennington knew that they had halted. Who could they be? Certainly not the drivers of the pack train, else they would have stopped with the burros.

He listened intently. Presently he heard horses walking slowly toward him from up the cañon. The two who had passed were coming back—stealthily.

"I sure have got myself in a pretty trap!" he soliloquized a moment later, when he heard the movement of mounted men in the cañon below him.

He drew his gun and sat waiting. It was not long that he had to wait. A voice coming from a short distance down the cañon addressed him.

"Ride out into the open and hold up your hands!" it said. "We got you surrounded and covered. If you make a break, we'll bore you. Come on, now, step lively—and keep your hands up!"

It was the voice of an American.

"Who in thunder are you?" demanded Pennington.

"I am a United States marshal," was the quick reply.

Pennington laughed. There was something convincing in the very tone of the man's voice—possibly because Custer had been expecting to meet Mexicans. Here was a hoax indeed; but evidently as much on the newcomers as on himself. They had expected to find a lawbreaker. They would doubtless be angry when they discovered that they had been duped.

Custer rode slowly out from beneath the tree.

"Hold up your hands, Mr. Pennington!" snapped the marshal.

Custer Pennington was nonplused. They knew who he was, and yet they demanded that he should hold up his hands like a common criminal.

"Hold on there!" he cried. "What's the joke? If you know who I am, what do you want me to hold up my hands for? How do I know you're a marshal?"

"You don't know it; but I know that you're armed, and that you're in a mighty bad hole. I don't know what you might do, and I ain't taking no chances. So stick 'em up, and do it quick. If anybody's going to get bored around here it 'll be you, and not none of my men!"

"You're a damned fool," said Pennington succinctly; but he held his hands before his shoulders, as he had been directed.

Five men rode from the shadows and surrounded him. One of them dismounted and disarmed him. He lowered his hands and looked about at them.

"Would you mind," he said, "showing me your authority for this, and telling me what in hell it's all about?"

One of the men threw back his coat, revealing a badge.

"That's my authority," he said; "that, and the goods we got on you."

"What goods?"

"Well, we expect to get 'em when we examine those packs."

"Look here!" said Custer. "You're all wrong. I have nothing to do with that pack train or what it's packing. I came up

here to catch the fellows who have been bringing it down through Ganado every Friday night, and who cut our fence last week. I don't know any more about what's in those packs than you do—evidently not as much."

"That's all right, Mr. Pennington. You'll probably get a chance to tell all that to a jury. We been laying for you since last spring. We didn't know it was you until one of your gang squealed; but we knew that this stuff was somewhere in the hills above L. A., and we aimed to get it and you sooner or later."

"Me?"

"Well, not you particularly, but whoever was bootlegging it. To tell you the truth, I'm plumb surprised to find who it is. I thought all along it was some gang of cheap greasers; but it don't make no difference who it is to your Uncle Sam."

"You say some one told you it was I?" asked Custer.

"Sure! How else would we know it? It don't pay to double-cross your pals, Mr. Pennington."

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"We're going to take you back to L. A. and get you held to the Federal grand jury."

"To-night?"

"We're going to take you back to-night."

"Can I stop at the house first?"

"No. We got a warrant to search the place, and we're going to leave a couple of my men here to do it the first thing in the morning. I got an idea you ain't the only one around there that knows something about this business."

As they talked, one of the deputies had taken a case from a pack and opened it.

"Look here!" he called. "It's it, all right!"

"It's what?" asked Custer.

"Oh, pe-ru-na, of course!" replied the deputy facetiously. "What did you think it was? I hope you never thought it none of that hootch stolen from a government bonded warehouse in Noo York!"

The others laughed at his joke.

"It's too bad," said the marshal, not at all unkindly, "for a decent young fellow like you to get mixed up in a nasty business like this."

"I agree with you," said Pennington.

His mind traveled like lightning, flashing a picture of Shannon Burke riding out of the hills and across the meadow above Jackknife Cañon; of her inquiry that very afternoon as to whether he was coming up here to-night. Had she really wished to dissuade him, or had she only desired to make sure of his intentions? The light would not shine from the big cupola to-night. What message would the darkness carry to Shannon Burke?

XXII

THEY took Custer down to the village of Ganado, where they had left their cars and obtained horses. Here they left the animals, including the Apache, with instructions that he should be returned to the Rancho del Ganado in the morning.

The inhabitants of the village, almost to a man, had grown up in neighborly friendship with the Penningtons. When he from whom the officers had obtained their mounts discovered the identity of the prisoner, his surprise was exceeded only by his anger.

"If I'd known who you was after," he said, "you'd never have got no horses from me. I'd 'a' hamstrung 'em first! I've known Cus Pennington since he was knee high to a grasshopper, and whatever you took him for he never done it. Wait till the colonel hears of this. You won't have no more job than a jack rabbit!"

The marshal turned threateningly toward the speaker.

"Shut up!" he advised. "If Colonel Pennington hears of this before morning, you'll wish to God you was a jack rabbit, and could get out of the country in two jumps! Now you get what I'm telling you—you're to keep your trap closed until morning. Hear me?"

"I ain't deaf, but sometimes I'm a leetle mite dumb." The last he added in a low aside to Pennington, accompanying it with a wink; and aloud: "I'm mighty sorry, Cus—*mighty* sorry. If I'd only knowed it was you! By gosh, I'll never get over this—furnishin' horses to help arrest a friend, and a Pennington!"

"Don't worry about that for a minute, Jim. I haven't done anything. It's just a big mistake."

The officers and their prisoner were in the car and ready to start. The marshal pointed a finger at Jim.

"Don't forget what I told you about keeping your mouth shut until morning," he admonished.

They drove off toward Los Angeles. Jim watched them for a moment, as the red tail light diminished in the distance. Then he turned into the office of his feed barn and took the telephone receiver from its hook. "Gimme Ganado No. 1," he said to the sleepy night operator.

It was five minutes before continuous ringing brought the colonel to the extension telephone in his bedroom. He seemed unable to comprehend the meaning of what Jim was trying to tell him, so sure was he that Custer was in bed and asleep in a near-by room; but at last he was half convinced, for he had known Jim for many years, and well knew his stability and his friendship.

"If it was anybody but you, Jim, I'd say you were a damned liar," he commented in characteristic manner; "but what in hell did they take the boy for?"

"They wouldn't say. Just as I told 'em, I don't know what he done, but I know he never done it."

"You're right, Jim—my boy couldn't do a crooked thing!"

"I'm just like you, colonel—I know there ain't a crooked hair in Cus Pennington's head. If there's anything I can do, colonel, you jest let me know."

"You'll bring the Apache up in the morning? Thank you again, Jim, and good-by."

He hung up the receiver. While he dressed hastily, he explained to his wife the purport of the message he had just received.

"What are you going to do, Custer?" she asked.

"I'm going to Los Angeles, Julia. Unless that marshal's driving a racing car, I'll be waiting for him when he gets there!"

Shortly before breakfast the following morning two officers, armed with a warrant, searched the castle on the hill. In Custer Pennington's closet they found something which seemed to fill them with elation—two full bottles of whisky and an empty bottle, each bearing a label identical with those on the bottles they had found in the cases borne by the burros. With this evidence and the laden pack train, they started off toward the village.

Shannon Burke had put in an almost sleepless night. For hours she had lain watching the black silhouette of the big cupola against the clear sky, waiting for the light which would announce that Custer had returned home in safety; but no light had shone to relieve her anxiety. She had strained her ears through the long hours of the night for the sound of shooting from the hills; but only the howling of coyotes and the hooting of owls had disturbed the long silence. She sought to assure herself that all was well—that Custer had returned and forgotten to switch on the cupola light—that he had not forgotten it, but that the bulb was burned out. She manufactured probable and improbable explanations by the score; but always a disturbing premonition of evil dispersed the cohorts of hope.

She was up early in the morning, and in the saddle at the first streak of dawn, riding directly to the stables of the Rancho del Ganado. The stableman was there, saddling the horses while they fed.

"No one has come down yet?" she asked.

"The Apache's gone," he replied. "I don't understand it. He hasn't been in his box all night. I was just thinkin' of goin' up to the house to see if Custer was there. Don't seem likely he'd be ridin' all night, does it?"

"No," she said. Her heart was in her mouth. She could scarcely speak. "I'll ride up for you," she managed to say.

Wheeling Baldy, she put him up the steep hill to the house. The iron gate that closed the patio arch at night was still down, so she rode around to the north side of the house and *coo-hooed* to attract the attention of some one within. Mrs. Pennington, followed by Eva, came to the door. Both were fully dressed. When they saw who it was, they came out and told Shannon what had happened.

He was not injured, then! The sudden sense of relief left her weak, and for a moment she did not consider the other danger that confronted him. He was safe! That was all she cared about just then. Later she commenced to realize the gravity of his situation, and the innocent part that she had taken in involving him in the toils of the scheme which her interference must have suggested to those actually responsible for the traffic in stolen liquor, the guilt of which they had now cleverly shifted to the shoulders of an innocent man. Intuitively she guessed Slick Allen's part in the unhappy contretemps of the previous night; for she knew of the threats he had made against Custer Pennington, and of

his complicity in the criminal operations of the bootleggers.

How much she knew! More than any other, she knew all the details of the whole tragic affair. She alone could untangle the knotted web, and yet she dared not until there was no other way. She dared not let them guess that she knew more of the matter than they. She could not admit such knowledge without revealing the source of it and exposing herself to the merited contempt of these people whose high regard had become her obsession, whose friendship was her sole happiness, and the love she had conceived for one of them the secret altar at which she worshiped.

In the last extremity, if there was no alternative, she would sacrifice everything for him. To that her love committed her; but she would wait until there was no other way. She had suffered so grievously through no fault of her own that she clung with desperation to the brief happiness which had come into her life, and which was now threatened, once again because of no wrong-doing on her part.

Fate had been consistently unkind to her. Was it fair that she should suffer always for the wickedness of another? She had at least the right to hope and wait.

But there was something that she could do. When she turned Baldy down the hill from the Penningtons', she took the road home that led past the Evanses' ranch, and, turning in, dismounted and tied Baldy at the fence. Her knock was answered by Mrs. Evans.

"Is Guy here?" asked Shannon.

Hearing her voice, Guy came from his room, drawing on his coat.

"You're getting as bad as the Penningtons," he said, laughing. "They have no respect for Christian hours!"

"Something has happened," she said, "that I thought you should know about. Custer was arrested last night by government officers and taken to Los Angeles. He was out on the Apache at the time. No one seems to know where he was arrested, or why; but the supposition is that they found him in the hills, for the man who runs the feed barn in the village—Jim—told the colonel that the officers got horses from him and rode up toward the ranch, and that it was a couple of hours later that they brought Custer back on the Apache. The stableman just told me that the Apache had not been in his stall all night, and I know—Custer told me not to tell, but it will make no difference now—that he was going up into the hills last night to try to catch the men who have been bringing down loads on burros every Friday night for a long time, and who cut his fence last Friday."

She looked straight into Guy's eyes as she spoke; but he dropped his as a flush mounted his cheek.

"I thought," she continued, "that Guy might want to go to Los Angeles and see if he could help Custer in any way. The colonel went last night."

"I'll go now," said Guy. "I guess I can help him."

His voice was suddenly weary, and he turned away with an air of dejection which assured Shannon that he intended to do the only honorable thing that he could do—assume the guilt that had been thrown upon Custer's shoulders, no matter what the consequences to himself. She had had little doubt that Guy would do this, for she realized his affection for Custer, as well as the impulsive generosity of his nature, which, however marred by weakness, was still fine by instinct.

Half an hour later, after a hasty breakfast, young Evans started for Los Angeles, while his mother and Shannon, standing on the porch of the bungalow, waved their good-byes as his roadster swung through the gate into the county road. Mrs. Evans had only a vague idea as to what her son could do to assist Custer Pennington out of his difficulty; but Shannon Burke knew that Pennington's fate lay in the hands of Guy Evans, unless she chose to tell what she knew.

Colonel Pennington had overtaken the marshal's car before the latter reached Los Angeles, but after a brief parley on the road he had discovered that he could do nothing to alter the officer's determination to place Custer in the county jail pending his preliminary hearing before a United States commissioner. Neither the colonel's plea that his son should be allowed to accompany him to a hotel for the night, nor his assurance that he would be personally responsible for the young man's appearance before the commissioner on the following morning, availed to move the obdurate marshal from his stand; nor would he permit the colonel to talk with the prisoner.

This was the last straw. Colonel Pennington had managed to dissemble outward

indications of his rising ire, but now an amused smile lighted his son's face as he realized that his father was upon the verge of an explosion. He caught the older man's eye and shook his head.

"It 'll only make it worse," he cautioned.

The colonel directed a parting glare at the marshal, muttered something about homeopathic intellects, and turned back to his roadster.

XXIII

DURING the long ride to Los Angeles, and later in his cell in the county jail, Custer Pennington had devoted many hours to seeking an explanation of the motives underlying the plan to involve him in a crime of which he had no knowledge, nor even a suspicion of the identity of its instigators. To his knowledge, he had no enemies whose hostility was sufficiently active to lead them to do him so great a wrong. He had had no trouble with any one recently, other than his altercation with Slick Allen several months before; yet it was obvious that he had been deliberately sacrificed for some ulterior purpose. What that purpose was he could only surmise.

The most logical explanation, he finally decided, was that those actually responsible, realizing that discovery was imminent, had sought to divert suspicion from themselves by fastening it upon another. That they had selected him as the victim might easily be explained on the ground that his embarrassing interest in their movements had already centered their attention upon him, while it also offered the opportunity for luring him into the trap without arousing his suspicions.

It was, then, just a combination of circumstances that had led him into his present predicament; but there still remained unanswered one question that affected his peace of mind more considerably than all the others combined. Who had divulged to the thieves his plans for the previous night?

Concurrently with that question there arose before his mind's eye a picture of Shannon Burke and Baldy as they topped the summit above Jackknife from the trail that led across the basin meadow back into the hills, he know not where.

"I can't believe that it was she," he told himself for the hundredth time. "She could not have done it. I won't believe it! She could explain it all if I could ask her; but I can't ask her. There is a great deal that I cannot understand, and the most inexplicable thing is that she could possibly have had any connection whatever with the affair."

When his father came with an attorney, in the morning, the son made no mention of Shannon Burke's ride into the hills, or of her anxiety, when they parted in the afternoon, to learn if he was going to carry out his plan for Friday night.

"Did any one know of your intention to watch for these men?" asked the attorney.

"No one," he replied; "but they might have become suspicious from the fact that the week before I had all the gates padlocked on Friday. They had to cut the fence that night to get through. They probably figured that it was getting too hot for them, and that on the following Friday I would take some other steps to discover them. Then they made sure of it by sending me that message from Los Angeles. Gee, but I bit like a sucker!"

"It is unfortunate," remarked the attorney, "that you had not discussed your plans with some one before you undertook to carry them out on Friday night. If we could thus definitely establish your motive for going alone into the hills, and to the very spot where you were discovered with the pack train, I think it would go much further toward convincing the court that you were there without any criminal intent than your own unsupported testimony to that effect."

"But haven't you his word for it?" demanded the colonel.

"I am not the court," replied the attorney, smiling.

"Well, if the court isn't a damned fool it 'll know he wouldn't have padlocked the gates the week before to keep himself out," stated the colonel conclusively.

"The government might easily assume that he did that purposely to divert suspicion from himself. At least, it is no proof of innocence."

Colonel Pennington snorted.

"The best thing to do now," said the attorney, "is to see if we can get an immediate hearing, and arrange for bail in case he is held to the grand jury."

"I'll go with you," said the colonel.

They had been gone but a short time when Guy Evans was admitted to Custer's cell. The latter looked up and smiled when he saw who his visitor was.

"It was bully of you to come," he said. "Bringing condolences, or looking for material, old thing?"

"Don't joke, Cus," exclaimed Evans. "It's too rotten to joke about, and it's all my fault."

"Your fault?"

"I'm the guilty one. I've come down to give myself up."

"Guilty! Give yourself up! What are you talking about?"

"God, Cus, I hate to tell you. It didn't seem such an awful thing to do until this happened. Every one's buying booze, or selling booze, or making booze. Every one's breaking the damned old Eighteenth Amendment, and it's got so it don't seem like committing a crime, or anything like that. You know, Cus, that I wouldn't do anything criminal, and oh, God, what 'll Eva think?"

Guy covered his face with his hands and choked back a sob.

"Just what in the devil are you talking about?" inquired Pennington. "Do you mean to tell me that you have been mixed up in—well, what do you know about that?" A sudden light had dawned upon Custer's understanding. "That hootch that you've been getting me—that I joked you about—it was really the stuff that was stolen from a bonded warehouse in New York? It wasn't any joke at all?"

"You can see for yourself now how much of a joke it was," replied Evans.

"I'll admit," returned Custer ruefully, "that it does require considerable of a sense of humor to see it in this joint!"

"What do you suppose they'll do to me?" asked Guy. "Do you suppose they'll send me to the penitentiary?"

"Tell me the whole thing from the beginning—who got you into it, and just what you've done. Don't omit a thing, no matter how much it incriminates you. I don't need to tell you, old man, that I'm for you, no matter what you've done."

"I know that, Cus; but I'm afraid no one can help me. I'm in for it. I knew it was stolen from the start. I have been selling it since last May — seven thousand seven hundred and seventy-six quarts of it —and I made a dollar on every quart. It was what I was going to start housekeeping on. Poor little Eva!" Again a sob half choked him. "It was Slick Allen that started me. First he sold me some; then he got me to sell you a bottle, and bring him the money. Then he had me, or at least he made me think so; and he insisted on my handling it for them out in the valley. It wasn't hard to persuade me, for it looked safe, and it didn't seem like such a rotten thing to do, and I wanted the money the worst way. I know they're all bum excuses. I shan't make any excuses — I'll take my medicine; but it's when I think of Eva that it hurts. It's only Eva that counts!"

"Yes," said Pennington, laying his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder. "It is only Eva who counts; and because of Eva, and because you and I love her so much, you cannot go to the penitentiary."

"What do you mean—cannot go?"

"Have you told any one else what you have just told me?"

"No."

"Don't. Go back home, and keep your mouth shut."

"You mean that you will take a chance of going up for what I did? Nothing doing! Do you suppose I'd let you, Cus, the best friend I've got in the world, go to the pen for me—for something I did?"

"It's not for you, Guy. I wouldn't go to the pen for you or any other man; but I'd go to the pen for Eva, and so would you."

"I know it, but I can't let you do it. I'm not rotten, Cus!"

"You and I don't count. To see her unhappy and humiliated would be worse for me than spending a few years in the penitentiary. I'm innocent. No matter if I am convicted, I'll know I'm innocent, and Eva'll know it, and so will all the rest at Ganado; but, Guy, they've got too much on you if they ever suspect you, and the fact that you voluntarily admitted your guilt would convince even my little sister. If you were sent up it might ruin her life—it *would* ruin it. Things could never be the same for her again; but if I was sentenced for a few years, it would only be the separation from a brother whom she knew to be innocent, and in whom she still had undiminished confidence. She wouldn't be humiliated—her life wouldn't be ruined; and when I came back everything would be just as it was before. If you go, things will not be the same when you come back —they can never be the same again. You cannot go!"

"I cannot let you go, and be punished for what I did, while I remain free!"

"You've got to — it's the easiest way. We've all got to be punished for what you did—those who love us are always punished for our sins; but let me tell you that I don't think you are going to escape punishment if I go up for this. You're going to suffer more than I. You're going to suffer more than you would if you went up yourself; but it can't be helped. The question is, are you man enough to do this for Eva? It is your sacrifice more than mine."

Evans swallowed hard and tried to speak. It was a moment before he succeeded.

"My God, Cus, I'd rather go myself!"

"I know you would."

"I can never have any self-respect again. I can never look a decent man in the face. Every time I see Eva, or your mother, or the colonel, I'll think: 'You dirty cur, you let their boy go to the pen for something you did!' Oh, Cus, please don't ask me to do it! There must be some other way. And—and, Cus, think of Grace. We've been forgetting Grace. What 'll it mean to Grace if you are sent up?"

"It won't mean anything to Grace, and you know it. None of us mean much to Grace any more."

Guy looked out of the little barred window, and tears came to his eyes.

"I guess you're right," he said.

"You're going to do it, Guy—for Eva?"

"For Eva—yes."

Pennington brightened up as if a great load had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Good!" he cried. "Now the chances are that I'll not be sent up, for they've nothing on me—they can't have; but if I am, you've got to take my place with the folks. You've had your lesson. I know you'll never pull another fool stunt like this again. And quit drinking, Guy. I haven't much excuse for preaching; but you're the sort that can't do it. Leave it alone. Good-by, now; I'd rather you were not here when father comes back—you might weaken."

Evans took the other's hand.

"I envy you, Cus—on the level, I do!"

"I know it; but don't feel too bad about it. It's one of those things that's done, and it can't be undone. Roosevelt would have called what you've got to do 'grasping the nettle.' Grasp it like a man!"

Evans walked slowly from the jail, entered his car, and drove away. Of the two hearts his was the heavier; of the two burdens his the more difficult to bear.

Custer Pennington, appearing before a United States commissioner that afternoon for his preliminary hearing, was held to the Federal grand jury, and admitted to bail. The evidence brought by the deputies who had searched the Pennington home, taken in connection with the circumstances surrounding his arrest, seemed to leave the commissioner no alternative. Even the colonel had to admit that to himself, though he would never have admitted it to another. The case would probably come before the grand jury on the following Wednesday.

The colonel wanted to employ detectives at once to ferret out those actually responsible for the theft and bootlegging of the stolen whisky; but Custer managed to persuade him not to do so, on the ground that it would be a waste of time and money, since the government was already engaged upon a similar pursuit.

"Don't worry, father," he said. "They haven't a shred of evidence that I stole the whisky, or that I ever sold any. They found me with it—that is all. I can't be hanged for that. Let them do the worrying. I want to get home in time to eat one of Hannah's dinners. I'll say they don't set much of a table in the sheriff's boarding house!"

"Where did you get the three bottles they found in your room?"

"I bought them."

"I asked where, not how."

"I might get some one else mixed up in this if I were to answer that question. I can't do it."

"No," said the colonel, "you can't. When you buy whisky, nowadays, you are usually compounding a felony. It's certainly a rotten condition to obtain in the land of the free; but you've got to protect your accomplices. I shall not ask you again; but they'll ask you in court, my boy."

"All the good it 'll do them!"

"I suppose so; but I'd hate to see my boy sent to the penitentiary."

"You'd hate to be in court and hear him divulge the name of a man who had trusted him sufficiently to sell him whisky."

"I'd rather see you go to the penitentiary!" the colonel said.

That night, at dinner, Custer made light of the charge against him, yet at the same time he prepared them for what might happen, for the proceedings before the commissioner had impressed him with the grav-

ity of his case, as had also the talk he had had with his attorney afterward.

"No matter what happens," he said to them all, "I shall know that you know I am not guilty."

"My boy's word is all I need," replied his mother.

Eva came and put her arms about him.

"They wouldn't send you to jail, would they?" she demanded. "It would break my heart!"

"Not if you knew I was innocent."

"N-no, not then, I suppose; but it would be awful. If you were guilty, it would kill me. I'd never want to live if my brother was convicted of a crime, and was guilty of it. I'd kill myself first!"

Her brother drew her face down and kissed her.

"That would be foolish, dear," he said. "No matter what one of us does, such an act would make it all the worse—for those who were left."

"I can't help it," she said. "It isn't just because I have had the honor of the Penningtons preached to me all my life. It's because it's in me — the Pennington honor. It's a part of me, just as it's a part of you, and mother, and father. It's a part of the price we have to pay for being Penningtons. I have always been proud of it, Custer, even if I am only a silly girl."

"I'm proud of it, too, and I haven't jeopardized it; but even if I had, you mustn't think about killing yourself on my account, or any one's else."

"Well, I know you're not guilty, so I don't have to."

"Good! Let's talk about something pleasant."

"Why didn't you see Grace while you were in Los Angeles?"

"I tried to. I called up her boarding place from the lawyer's office. I understood the woman who answered the phone to say that she would call her, but she came back in a couple of minutes and said that Grace was out on location."

"Did you leave your name?"

"I told the woman who I was when she answered the phone."

"I'm sorry you didn't see her," said Mrs. Pennington. "I often think that Mrs. Evans, or Guy, should run down to Los Angeles occasionally and see Grace."

"That's what Shannon says," said Custer. "I'll try to see her next week, before I come home."

"Shannon was up nearly all afternoon waiting to hear if we received any word from you. When you telephoned that you had been held to the Federal grand jury, she would scarcely believe it. She said there must be some mistake."

"Did she say anything else?"

"She asked whether Guy got there before you were held, and I told her that you said Guy visited you in the jail. She seems so worried about the affair—just as if she were one of the family. She is such a dear girl! I think I grow to love her more and more every day."

"Yes," said Custer, non-committally.

"She asked me one rather peculiar question," Eva went on.

"What was that?"

"She asked if I was *sure* that it was *you* who had been held to the grand jury."

"That was odd, wasn't it?"

"She's so sure of your innocence—just as sure as we are," said Eva.

"Well, that's very nice of her," remarked Custer.

XXIV

THE next morning he saw Shannon, who came to ride with them, the Penningtons, as had been her custom. She looked tired, as if she had spent a sleepless night. She had—she had spent two sleepless nights, and she had had to fight the old fight all over again. It had been very hard, even though she had won, for it had shown her that the battle was not over. She had thought that she had conquered the craving; but that had been when she had had no troubles or unhappiness to worry her mind and nerves. The last two days had been days of suffering for her, and the two sleepless nights had induced a nervous condition that begged for the quieting influence of the little white powder.

Custer noticed immediately that something was amiss. The roses were gone from her cheeks, leaving a suggestion of the old pallor; and though she smiled and greeted him happily, he thought that he detected an expression of wistfulness and pain in her face when she was not conscious that others were observing her.

There was a strange suggestion of change in their relations, which Custer did not attempt to analyze. It was as if he had been gone a long time, and, returning, had found Shannon changed through the natural processes of time and separation. She was not

the same girl—she could never be the same again, nor could their relations ever be the same.

The careless freedom of their consociation, which had resembled that of a brother and sister more than any other relationship between a man and a woman, had gone forever. What had replaced it Custer did not know. Sometimes he thought that it was a suspicion of Shannon that clung to his mind in spite of himself; but again and again he assured himself that he held no suspicion of her.

He wished, though, that she would explain that which was to him inexplicable. He had the faith to believe that she could explain it satisfactorily; but would she do so? She had had the opportunity, before this thing had occurred, and had not taken advantage of it. He would give her another opportunity that day, and he prayed that she would avail herself of it. Why he should care so much, he did not try to reason. He did not even realize how much he did care.

Presently he turned toward her.

"I am going to ride over to the east pasture after breakfast," he said, and waited.

"Is that an invitation?"

He smiled and nodded.

"But not if it isn't perfectly convenient," he added.

"I'd love to come with you. You know I always do."

"Fine! And you'll breakfast with us?"

"Not to-day. I have a couple of letters to write that I want to get off right away; but I'll be up between eight thirty and nine. Is that too late?"

"I'll ride down after breakfast and wait for you—if I won't be in the way."

"Of course you won't. It will take me only a few minutes to write my letters."

"How are you going to mail them? This is Sunday."

"Mr. Powers is going to drive in to Los Angeles to-day. He'll mail them in the city."

"Who looks after things when Mr. and Mrs. Powers are away?"

"Who looks after things? Why, I do."

"The chickens, and the sow, and Baldy—you take care of them all?"

"Certainly, and I have more than that now."

"How's that?"

"Nine little pigs! They came yesterday. They're perfect beauties."

The man laughed.

"What are you laughing about?" she demanded.

"The idea of you taking care of chickens and pigs and a horse!"

"I don't see anything funny about it, and it's lots of fun. Did you think I was too stupid?"

"I was just thinking what a change two months have made. What would you have done if you'd been left alone two months ago with a hundred hens, a horse, and ten pigs to care for?"

"The question then would have been what the hens, the horse, and the pigs would have done; but now I know pretty well what to do. The two letters I have to write are about the little pigs. I don't know much about them, and so I am writing to Berkeley and Washington for the latest bulletins."

"Why don't you ask *us?*"

"Gracious, but I do! I am forever asking the colonel questions, and the boys at the hog house must hate to see me coming. I've spent hours in the office, reading Lovejoy and Colton; but I want something for ready reference. I've an idea that I can raise lots more hogs than I intended by fencing the orchard and growing alfalfa between the rows, for pasture. There's something solid and substantial about hogs that suggests a bank balance even in the years when the orange crop may be short or a failure, or the market poor."

"You've got the right idea," said Custer. "There isn't a rancher or an orchardist, big or little, in the valley who couldn't make more money year in and year out if he'd keep a few brood sows."

"What's Cus doing?" asked Eva, who had reined back beside them. "Preaching hog raising again? That's his idea of a dapper little way to entertain a girl—hogs, Herefords and horses! Wouldn't he make a hit in society? Regular little tea pointer, I'll say!"

"I knew you were about to say something," remarked her brother. "You've been quiet for all of five minutes."

"I've been thinking," said Eva. "I've been thinking how lonely it will be when you have to go away to jail."

"Why, they can't send me to jail—I haven't done anything," he tried to reassure her.

"I'm so afraid, Cus!" The tears came to her eyes. "I lay awake for hours last

night, thinking about it. Oh, Cus, I just couldn't stand it if they sent you to jail! Do you think the men who did it would let you go for something they did? Could any one be so wicked? I never hated any one in my life, but I could hate them, if they don't come forward and save you. I could *hate* them, *hate* them, *hate* them! Oh, Cus, I believe that I could *kill* the man who would do such a thing to my brother!"

"Come, dear, don't worry about it. The chances are that they'll free me. Even if they don't, you mustn't feel quite so bitterly against the men who are responsible. There may be reasons that you know nothing of that would keep them silent. Let's not talk about it. All we can do now is to wait and see what the grand jury is going to do. In the meantime I don't intend to worry."

Shannon Burke, her heart heavy with shame and sorrow, listened as might a condemned man to the reading of his death sentence. She felt almost the degradation that might have been hers had she deliberately planned to ensnare Custer Pennington in the toils that had been laid for him.

She determined that she would go before the grand jury and tell all she knew. Then she would go away. She would not have to see the contempt and hatred they must surely feel for her after she had recited the cold facts that she must lay before the jury, unmitigated by any of those extenuating truths that must lie forever hidden in the secret recesses of her soul. They would know only that she might have warned Custer, and did not; that she might have cleared him at his preliminary hearing, and did not. The fact that she had come to his rescue at the eleventh hour would not excuse her, in their minds, of the guilt of having permitted the Pennington honor to be placed in jeopardy needlessly; nor could it explain her knowledge of the crime, or those associations of her past life that had made it possible for her to have gained such knowledge.

No, she could never face them again after the following Wednesday; but until then she would cling to the brief days of happiness that remained to her before the final catastrophe of her life, for it was thus that she thought of it—the moment and the act that would forever terminate her intercourse with the Penningtons, that would turn the respect of the man she loved to loathing.

She counted the hours before the end. There would be two more morning rides—to-morrow and Tuesday. They would ask her to dinner, or to lunch, or to breakfast several times in the ensuing three days, and there would be rides with Custer. She would take all the happy memories that she could into the bleak and sunless future.

Their ride that morning was over a loved and familiar trail that led across El Camino Corto over low hills into Horse Camp Cañon, and up Horse Camp to Coyote Springs; then over El Camino Largo to Sycamore Cañon and down beneath the old, old sycamores to the ranch. She felt that she knew each bush and tree and bowlder, and they held for her the quiet restfulness of the familiar faces of old friends. She should miss them, but she would carry them in her memory forever.

When they came to the fork in the road, she would not let Custer ride home with her.

"At eight thirty, then," he called to her, as she urged Baldy into a canter and left them with a gay wave of the hand that gave no token of the heavy sorrow in her heart.

As was her custom, she ate breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Powers at the little tenant cottage a couple of hundred yards in rear of her own bungalow — a practice which gave her an opportunity to discuss each day's work in advance with her foreman, and at the same time to add to her store of information concerning matters of ranching and citrus culture. Her knowledge of these things had broadened rapidly, and was a constant source of surprise to Powers, who took great pride in bragging about it to his friends; for Shannon had won as great a hold upon the hearts of these two as she had upon all who were fortunate enough to know her well.

After breakfast, as she was returning to her bungalow to write her letters, she saw a Mexican boy on a bicycle turn in at her gate. They met in front of the bungalow.

"Are you Miss Burke?" he asked. "Bartolo says for you to come to his camp in the mountains this morning, sure," he went on, having received an affirmative reply.

"Who is Bartolo?"

"He says you know. You went to his camp a week ago yesterday."

"Tell him I do not know him and will not go."

"He says to tell you that he only wants to talk to you about your friend who is in trouble."

The girl thought for a moment. Possibly here was a way out of her dilemma. If she could force Bartolo by threats of exposure, he might discover a way to clear Custer Pennington without incriminating himself. She turned to the boy.

"Tell him I will come."

"I do not see him again. He is up in his camp now. He told me this yesterday. He also told me to tell you that he would be watching for you, and if you did not come alone you would not find him."

"Very well," she said, and turned into the bungalow.

She wrote her letters, but she was not thinking about them. Then she took them over to Powers to take to the city for her. After that she went to the telephone and called the Rancho del Ganado, asking for Custer when she got the connection.

"I'm terribly disappointed," she said, when he came to the telephone. "I find I simply can't ride this morning; but if you'll put it off until afternoon—"

"Why, certainly! Come up to lunch, and we'll ride afterward," he told her.

"You won't go, then, until afternoon?" she asked.

"I'll ride over to the east pasture this morning, and we'll just take a ride any old place that you want to go this afternoon."

"All right," she replied.

She had hoped that he would not ride that morning. There was a chance that he might see her, even though the east pasture was miles from the trail she would ride, for there were high places on both trails, where a horseman would be visible for several miles.

"This noon at lunch, then," he said.

XXV

HALF an hour later Custer Pennington swung into the saddle and headed the Apache up Sycamore Cañon.

The trail to the east pasture led through Jackknife. As he passed the spot where he had been arrested on the previous Friday night, the man made a wry face—more at the recollection of the ease with which he had been duped than because of the fact of his arrest. Being free from any sense of guilt, he could view with a certain lightness of spirit that was almost levity the mere physical aspects of possible duress. The reality of his service to Eva could not but tend to compensate for any sorrow he must feel because of the suffering his conviction and imprisonment might bring to his family, so much greater must be their sorrow should Eva be permitted to learn the truth.

When Shannon had broken their engagement for the morning, he had felt a disappointment entirely out of proportion to its cause—a thing which he had realized himself, but had been unable to analyze. Now, in anticipation of seeing her at noon and riding with her after lunch, he experienced a rise in spirits that was equally unaccountable. He liked her very much, and she was excellent company—which, of course, would account for the pleasure he derived from being with her. To-day, too, he hoped for an explanation of her ride into the mountains the week before, so that there might be no longer any shadow on his friendship for her.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that this afternoon she would explain the whole matter quite satisfactorily, and presently he found himself whistling as if there were no such places as jails or penitentiaries in the whole wide and beautiful world.

Just then he reached the summit of the trail leading out of Jackknife Cañon toward the east pasture. As was his wont, the Apache stopped to breathe after the hard climb, and, as seems to be the habit of all horses in like circumstances, he turned around and faced in the opposite direction from that in which his rider had been going.

Below and to Custer's right the ranch buildings lay dotted about in the dust like children's toys upon a gray rug. Beyond was the castle on the hill, shining in the sun, and farther still the soft-carpeted valley, in grays and browns and greens. Then the young man's glance wandered to the left and out over the basin meadow, and instantly the joy died out of his heart and the happiness from his eyes. Straight along the mysterious trail loped a horse and rider toward the mountains, and even at that distance he recognized them as Baldy and Shannon.

The force of the shock was almost equivalent to an unexpected blow in the face. What could it mean? He recalled her questions. She had deliberately sought to learn his plans, as she had that other day, and then, as before, she had hastened off to some mysterious rendezvous in the hills.

Suddenly a hot wave of anger surged through him. Quiet and self-controlled as he usually was, there were times when the Pennington temper seized and dominated him so completely that he himself was appalled by the acts it precipitated. Under its spell a Pennington might commit murder. Now Custer did what was almost as foreign to his nature—he cursed the girl who rode on, unconscious of his burning eyes upon her, toward the mountains. He cursed her aloud, searching his memory for opprobrious epithets and anathemas to hurl after her.

This was the end. He was through with her forever. What did he know about her? What did any of them know about her? She had never mentioned her life or associations in the city—he recalled that now. She had known no one whom they knew, and they had taken her in and treated her as a daughter of the house, without knowing anything of her; and this was their reward!

She was doubtless a hireling of the gang that had stolen the whisky and disposed of it through Guy. They had sent her here to spy on Guy and to watch the Penningtons. It was she who had set the trap in which he had been caught, not to save Guy, but to throw the suspicion of guilt upon Custer.

But for what reason? There was no reason except that he had been selected from the first to be the scapegoat when the government officers were too hot upon their trail. She had watched him carefully. God, but she had been cunning and he credulous! There had been scarce a day that she had not been with him. She had ridden the hills with him, and she had kept him from following the mysterious trail—so he reasoned in his rage, though as a matter of fact she had done nothing of the sort; but anger and hate are blind, and Custer Pennington was angry and filled with hate.

He believed that he never had hated before as he hated this girl now, so far to the other extreme had the shock of her duplicity driven his regard for her. He would see her just once more, and he would tell her what he thought of her, so that there might be no chance that she would ever again enter the home of the Penningtons. He must see to that before he went away, that Eva might not be exposed to the influence of such a despicable character.

But he could not see her to-day. He could not trust himself to see her, for even in his anger he remembered that she was a woman, and that when he saw her he must treat her as a woman. If she had been within reach when he first discovered her, a moment since, he could have struck her, choked her.

With the realization, the senseless fury of his anger left him. He turned the Apache away, and headed him again toward the east pasture; but deep within his heart was a cold anger that was quite as terrible, though in a different way.

Shannon Burke rode up the trail toward the camp of the smugglers, all unconscious that there looked down upon her from a high ridge behind eyes filled with hate and loathing—the eyes of the man she loved.

She put Baldy up the steep trail that had so filled her with terror when she first scaled it, and down upon the other side into the grove of oaks that had hidden the camp; but now there was no camp there—only the débris that always marks the stopping place of men.

As she reached the foot of the trail, she saw Bartolo standing beneath a great oak, awaiting her. His pony stood with trailing reins beneath the tree. A rifle butt protruded from a boot on the right of the saddle. He came forward as she guided Baldy toward the tree.

"*Buenos dias, señorita,*" he greeted her, twisting his pock-marked face into the semblance of a smile.

"What do you want of me?" Shannon demanded.

"I need money," he said. "You get money from Evans. He got all the money from the hootch we take down two weeks ago. We never get no chance to get it from him."

"I'll get you nothing!"

"You get money now—and whenever I want it," said the Mexican, "or I tell about Crumb. You Crumb's woman. I tell how you peddle dope. I know! You do what I tell you, or you go to the pen. *Sabe?*"

"Now listen to me," said the girl. "I didn't come up here to take orders from you. I came to give you orders."

"What?" exclaimed the Mexican, and then he laughed aloud. "You give me orders? That is damn funny!"

"Yes, it is funny. You will enjoy it immensely when I tell you what you are to do."

"Hurry, then; I have no time to waste."

He was still laughing.

"You are going to find some way to clear Mr. Pennington of the charge against him. I don't care what the way is, so long as it does not incriminate any other innocent person. If you can do it without getting yourself in trouble, well and good. I do not care; but you must see that there is evidence given before the grand jury next Wednesday that will prove Mr. Pennington's innocence."

"Is that all?" inquired Bartolo, grinning broadly.

"That is all."

"And if I don't do it—eh?"

"Then I shall go before the grand jury and tell them about you, and Allen—about the opium and the morphine and the cocaine—how you smuggled the stolen booze from the ship off the coast up into the mountains."

"You think you would do that?" he asked. "But how about me? Wouldn't I be telling everything I know about you? Allen would testify, too, and they would make Crumb come and tell how you lived with him. Oh, no, I guess you don't tell the grand jury nothing!"

"I shall tell them everything. Do you think I care about myself? I will tell them all that Allen or Crumb could tell; and listen, Bartolo—I can tell them something more. There used to be five men in your gang. There were three when I came up last week, and Allen is in jail; but where is the other?"

The man's face went black with anger, and perhaps with fear, too.

"What you know about that?" he demanded sharply.

"Allen told Crumb the first time he came to the Hollywood bungalow that he was having trouble among his gang, that you were a hard lot to handle, and that already one named Bartolo had killed one named Gracial. How would you like me to tell that to the grand jury?"

"You never tell that to no one!" growled the Mexican. "You know too damn much for your health!"

He had stepped suddenly forward and seized her wrist. She struck at him and at the same time put the spurs to Baldy—in her fear and excitement more severely than she had intended. The high-spirited animal, unused to such treatment, leaped forward past the Mexican, who, clinging to the girl's wrist, dragged her from the saddle. Baldy turned, and, feeling himself free, ran for the trail that led toward home.

"You know too damn much!" repeated Bartolo. "You better off up here alongside Gracial!"

The girl had risen to her feet and stood facing him. There was no fear in her eyes. She was very beautiful, and her beauty was not lost upon the Mexican.

"You mean that you would kill me to keep me from telling the truth about you?" she asked.

"Why not? Should I die instead? If you had kept your mouth shut, you would have been all right; but now"—he shrugged suggestively—"you better off up here beside Gracial."

"They'll get you and hang you for it," she said.

"Who will know?"

"The boy who brought me the message from you."

"He will not tell. He my son."

"I wrote a note and left it in my desk before I came up here, telling everything, for fear of something of this sort," she said.

"You lie!" he accused, correctly; "but for fear you did, I go down and burn your house to-night, after I get through with you. The ground pretty hard after the hot weather—it take me long time to dig a hole beside Gracial!"

The girl was at her wits' end now. Her pitiful little lie had not availed. She began to realize that nothing would avail. She had made the noose, stuck her head into it, and sprung the trap. It was too late to alter the consequences. The man had the physique of a bull—she could not hope to escape him by recourse to any power other than her wits, and in the first effort along that line she had failed miserably and put him on his guard.

Her case appeared hopeless. She thought of pleading with him, but realized the futility of it. The fact that she did not do so indicated her courage, which had not permitted her to lose her head. She saw that it was either his life or hers, as he saw the matter, and that it was going to be hers was obvious.

The man stood facing her, holding her by the wrist. His eyes appraised her boldly.

"You damn good-looking," he said, and pulled the girl toward him. "Before I kill you, I—"

He threw an arm about her roughly, and, leaning far over her as she pulled away, he sought to reach her lips with his.

XXVI

THE Apache had taken but a few steps on the trail toward the east pasture when Custer reined him in suddenly and wheeled him about.

"I'll settle this thing now," he muttered. "I'll catch her with them. I'll find out who the others are. By God, I've got her now, and I've got them!"

He spurred the Apache into a lope along the steep and dangerous declivity leading downward into the basin. The horse was surprised. Never before had he been allowed to go down hill faster than a walk—his sound forelegs attested the careful horsemanship of his rider.

Where the trail wound around bushes, he took perilous jumps on the steep hillside, for his speed was too great to permit him to make the short turns. He cleared them, and somehow he stuck to the trail beyond. His iron shoes struck fire from half embedded bowlders.

A rattler crossing the trail ahead coiled, buzzing its warning. The hillside was steep—there was no footing above or below the snake. The Apache could not have stopped in time to save himself from those poisoned fangs. A coward horse would have wheeled and gone over the cliff; but the Morgan is no coward.

The rider saw the danger at the instant the horse did. The animal felt the spurs touch him lightly, he heard a word of encouragement from the man he trusted. As the snake struck, he rose, gathering his four feet close to his belly, and cleared the danger spot far out of reach of the needle-like fangs.

The trail beyond was narrow, rocky, and shelving — the thing could not have happened in a worse place. The Apache lit, stumbled, slipped. His off hind foot went over the edge. He lunged forward upon his knees.

Only the cool horsemanship of his rider saved them both. A pound of weight thrown in the wrong direction would have toppled the horse to the bottom of the rocky gorge; a heavy hand upon the bit would have accomplished the same result. Pennington sat easily the balanced seat that gave the horse the best chance to regain his footing. His touch upon the bit was only sufficient to impart confidence to his mount, giving the animal's head free play, as nature intended, as he scrambled back to the trail again.

At last they reached the safer footing of the basin, and were off in a straight line for the ravine into which led the mysterious trail. The Apache knew that there was need for haste—an inclination of his master's body, a closing of the knees against his barrel, the slight raising of the bridle hand, had told him this more surely than loud cries or the punishment of steel rowels. He flattened out and flew.

The cold rage that gripped Pennington brooked no delay. He was glad, though, that he was unarmed; for he knew that when he came face to face with the men with whom Shannon Burke had conspired against him, he might again cease to be master of his anger.

They reached the foot of the acclivity terminating at the summit of the ridge beyond which lay the camp of the bootleggers. Again the man urged his mount to the necessity of speed. The powerful beast leaped upward along the steep trail, digging his toes deep into the sun-baked soil, every muscle in his body strained to the limit of its powers.

At the summit they met Baldy, head and tail erect, snorting and riderless. The appearance of the horse and his evident fright bespoke something amiss. Custer had seen him just as he was emerging from the upper end of the dim trail leading down the opposite side of the hogback. He turned the Apache into it and headed him down toward the oaks.

Below, Shannon was waging a futile fight against the burly Bartolo. She struck at his face and attempted to push him from her, but he only laughed his crooked laugh and pushed her slowly toward the trampled dust of the abandoned camp.

"Before I kill you—" he repeated again and again, as if it were some huge joke.

He heard the sound of the Apache's hoofs upon the trail above, but he thought it the loose horse of the girl. Custer was almost at the bottom of the trail when the Mexican glanced up and saw him. With a curse, he hurled Shannon aside and leaped toward his pony.

At the same instant the girl saw the Apache and his rider, and in the next she saw Bartolo seize his rifle and attempt to draw it from its boot. Leaping to her feet,

she sprang toward the Mexican, who was cursing frightfully because the rifle had stuck and he could not readily extricate it from the boot. As she reached him, he succeeded in jerking the weapon free. Swinging about, he threw it to his shoulder and fired at Pennington, just as Shannon threw herself upon him, clutching at his arms and dragging the muzzle of the weapon downward. He struck at her face, and tried to wrench the rifle from her grasp; but she clung to it with all the desperation that the danger confronting the man she loved engendered.

Custer had thrown himself from the saddle and was running toward them. Bartolo saw that he could not regain the rifle in time to use it. He struck the girl a terrible blow in the face that sent her to the ground. Then he turned and vaulted into his saddle, and was away across the bottom and up the trail on the opposite side before Pennington could reach him and drag him from his pony.

Custer turned to the girl lying motionless upon the ground. He knelt and raised her in his arms. She had fainted, and her face was very white. He looked down into it—the face of the girl he hated. He felt his arms about her, he felt her body against his, and suddenly a look of horror filled his eyes.

He laid her back upon the ground, and stood up. He was trembling violently. As he had held her in his arms, there had swept over him an almost irresistible desire to crush her to him, to cover her eyes and cheeks with kisses, to smother her lips with them—the girl he hated!

A great light had broken upon his mental horizon—a light of understanding that left all his world in the dark shadow of despair. He loved Shannon Burke!

Again he knelt beside her, and very gently he lifted her in his arms until he could support her across one shoulder. Then he whistled to the Apache, who was nibbling the bitter leaves of the live oak. When the horse came to him, he looped the bridle reins about his arm and started on foot up the trail down which he had just ridden, carrying Shannon across his shoulder. At the summit of the ridge he found Baldy grazing upon the sparse, burned grasses of late September.

It was then that Shannon Burke opened her eyes. At first, confused by the rush of returning recollections, she thought that it was the Mexican who was carrying her; but an instant later she recognized the whipcord riding breeches and the familiar boots and spurs of the son of Ganado. Then she stirred upon his shoulder.

"I am all right now," she said. "You may put me down. I can walk."

He lowered her to the ground, but he still supported her as they stood facing each other.

"You came just in time," she said. "He was going to kill me."

"I am glad I came," was all that he said.

She noticed how tired and pinched Custer's face looked, as if he had risen from a sick bed after a long period of suffering. He looked older—very much older—and oh, so sad! It wrung her heart; but she did not question him. She was waiting for him to question her, for she knew that he must wonder why she had come here, and what the meaning of the encounter he had witnessed; but he did not ask her anything, beyond inquiring whether she thought she was strong enough to sit her saddle if he helped her mount.

"I shall be all right now," she assured him.

He caught Baldy and assisted her into the saddle. Then he mounted the Apache and led the way along the trail toward home. They were halfway across the basin meadow before either spoke. It was Shannon who broke the silence.

"You must have wondered what I was doing up there," she said, with a backward nod of her head.

"That would not be strange, would it?"

"I will tell you."

"No," he said. "It is bad enough that you went there to-day and the Saturday before I was arrested. Anything more that you could tell me would only make it worse. Do you remember that girl I told you about—that friend of Cousin William—who visited us?"

"Yes."

"I followed you up here to-day to tell you the same thing I told her."

"I understand," she said.

"You do not understand," he snapped, almost angrily. "You understand nothing. I only said that I followed to tell you that. I have not told you, have I? Well, I don't intend to tell you; but my shame that I don't is enough without you telling me any more to add to it. There can be no honorable excuse for your having come here

that other time, or this time, either. There is no reason in the world why a woman should have any dealings with criminals, or any knowledge that would make dealings with them possible. That is the reason I don't want you to tell me more. Oh, Shannon"—his voice broke—"I don't want to hear anything bad about you!"

She had been upon the verge of just anger until then. Even now she did not understand—only that he wanted to believe in her, however much he doubted her, and that their friendship had meant more to him than she had imagined.

"But I must tell you, Custer," she insisted. "Now that you have learned this much, I can see that your suspicions wrong me more than I deserve. I came here the Saturday before you were arrested to warn them that you were going to watch for them on the following Friday. Though I did not know the men, I knew what sort they were, and that they would kill you the moment they found that they were discovered. It was only to save your life that I came that other time, and this time I came to try to force them to go before the grand jury and clear you of the charge against you; but when I threatened the man, and he found what I knew about him, he said that he would kill me."

"You did not know that I was going to be arrested that night?"

"Oh, Custer, how could you believe that of me?"

"I didn't want to believe it."

"I came into all this information—about the work of this gang—by accidentally overhearing a conversation in Hollywood, months ago. I know the names of the principals, I know Guy's connection with them. To-day I was trying to keep Guy's name out, too, if that were possible; but he is guilty and you are not. I cannot understand how he could come back from Los Angeles without telling them the truth and removing the suspicion from you."

"I would not let him," said Pennington.

"You would not let him? You would go to the penitentiary for the crime of another?"

"Not for him, but for Eva. Guy and I thrashed it all out. He wanted to give himself up—he almost demanded that I should let him; but it can't be done. Eva must never know."

"But, Custer, you can't go! It wouldn't be fair—it wouldn't be right. I won't let you go! I know enough to clear you, and I shall go before the grand jury on Wednesday and tell all I know."

"No," he said. "You must not. It would involve Guy."

"I won't mention Guy."

"But you will mention others, and they will mention Guy—don't doubt that for a minute." He turned suddenly toward her. "Promise me, Shannon, that you will not go—that you will not mention what you know to a living soul. I would rather go to the pen for twenty years than see Eva's life ruined. You don't know her. She's gay and happy and frivolous on the outside; but deep within her is a soul of wondrous sensitiveness and beauty, which is fortified and guarded by her pride and her honor. Strike down one of these, and you will have given her soul a wound from which it may never recover. She can understand neither meanness nor depravity in men and women. Should she ever learn that Guy had been connected with this gang, and that the money upon which they were to start their married life was the fruits of his criminality, it would break her heart. I know that Guy isn't criminally inclined, and that this will be a lesson that will keep him straight as long as he lives; but she wouldn't look at it that way. Now do you see why you must not tell what you know?"

"Perhaps you are right, but it seems to me she would not suffer any more if Guy went than if her brother went. She loves you very much."

"But she will know that I am innocent. If Guy went, she would know that he was guilty."

Shannon had no answer to this, and they were silent for a while.

"You will help me to keep this from Eva?" he asked.

"Yes."

She was thinking of the futility of her sacrifice, and wondering what explanation he was putting upon her knowledge of the activities of the criminals. He had said that there could be no reason in the world why a woman should have any dealings with such men, or any knowledge that would make dealings with them possible. What would he think of her if he knew the truth?

The man's mind was a chaos of conflicting thoughts—the sudden realization of a love that was as impossible as it was un-

welcome—recollection of his vows to Grace, which were as binding upon his honor as the marriage vows themselves would have been—doubts as to the character and antecedents of this girl who rode at his side today, and whose place in his life had suddenly assumed an importance beyond that of any other.

Then he turned a little, his eyes rested upon her profile, and he found it hard to doubt. It seemed impossible that there could be guile or sin beneath that beautiful exterior.

Shannon felt his eyes upon her, and looked up.

"You have been so good to me, Custer, all of you—you can never know how I have valued the friendship of the Penningtons, or what it has meant to me, or how I have striven to deserve it. I would have done anything to repay a part, at least, of what it has done for me. That was what I was trying to do—that is why I wanted to go before the grand jury, no matter what the cost to me; but I failed, and perhaps I have only made it worse. I do not even know that you believe me."

"I believe you, Shannon," he said. "There is much that I do not understand; but I believe that what you did was done in our interests. There is nothing more that any of us can do now but keep still about what we know, for the moment one of those actually responsible is threatened with exposure Guy's name will be divulged—you may rest assured of that. They would be only too glad to shift the responsibility to his shoulders."

"But you will make some effort to defend yourself?"

"I shall simply plead not guilty, and tell the truth about why I was up there when the officers arrested me. That is all that I can do."

"You will make no other defense?"

"What other defense can I make that would not risk incriminating Guy?" Custer asked her.

She shook her head. It seemed quite hopeless.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*)*

I LOOKED UP TO THE HILLS

I SHALL miss your stern, strong shapes against the sky;
I shall miss your upland challenge to my heart.
I hold you with long looks, as a lover's farewell eye
Holds the loved face from which he turns to part.
Mountains, good-by!

I would hoard your strength in my soul
For the day that is near,
When I shall find nothing noble to fill my eyes,
Nor trumpets high to fill with glory my ear—
The glory of the sun on the hills at his conquering rise;
Nothing that just to look on in the splendor of light
Makes me as morning itself,
Girded as morning with might;
And enough is to hear and to see,
To be one with the march of the whole.

I go where help there is none of morning stream
Among the bowlders singing, nor pure light
Of moon or moonrise. Save by prayer or dream
Safety is none, but your remembered might
Shall aid my weakness, and my soul make strong;
So shall my feet pace still yon gleaming height,
And my heart sing with your remembered song.

Richard Leigh